

London Borough of Islington

Homes and Communities Scrutiny Committee - 26 September 2024

Minutes of the meeting of the Homes and Communities Scrutiny Committee held at Council Chamber, Town Hall, Upper Street, N1 2UD on 26 September 2024 at 7.30 pm.

Present: **Councillors:** Jackson (Chair), Cinko-Oner (Vice-Chair), McHugh,
Graham, North, Donaghey and McDonald
Also Present: **Councillors:** Chapman and O'Halloran

Councillor Jason Jackson in the Chair

14 **APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE (Item A1)**

Apologies were received from Councillor Gilgunn and Co-optee Rose McDonald.

15 **DECLARATION OF SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS (Item A2)**

There were no declarations of substitute members.

16 **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST (Item A3)**

There were no declarations of interest.

17 **MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING (Item A4)**

It was noted that minutes erroneously indicated that Councillor North attended meeting on 17 July when he had given his apologies.

In response to funds received from the Selective licensing scheme, the Corporate Director advised that funds received are ring fenced and used to drive up standards and support landlords.

In addition, it was noted that the licensing regime has no provision for a register for tenants, however council officers could look into it.

With regards to concerns about waste collection from converted properties with multiple occupants, meeting was advised that although Council continues to promote recycling activities, this concern would be discussed with the waste team.

RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the meeting held on 18 July 2024 be confirmed as an accurate record of proceedings subject to amending the minutes as stated above and the Chair be authorised to sign them.

18 **CHAIR'S REPORT (Item A5)**

The Chair acknowledged Committee's thanks to Councillor Cinko-Oner for her support and contribution both as the Vice-chair and member of the committee over the last few years and welcoming Councillor McHugh as the new Vice Chair for the remaining months of the 2024/25 Municipal year.

19 **PUBLIC QUESTIONS (Item A6)**

None

20

MAIN SCRUTINY REVIEW - ISLINGTON COMMUNITY CENTRES - TO AGREE SCRUTINY INITIATION DOCUMENT (Item B1)

Councillor Chapman, Executive Member for Equalities, Communities and Inclusion and Lorna Hughes, Interim Director AD Community Wellbeing and Engagement introduced review into Islington Community Centres. The following points were highlighted:

- Community Centres are places for communities coming together, youth development, helps to address social isolation and early intervention for health.
- It is important that community centres are operating in the most useful manner for the community that they serve.
- It is important to note that some of these buildings are aged, in poor condition and not accessible, issues which the review will consider.
- Council is presently undertaking a review into its community assets been delayed due to personnel changes and covid.
- It is hoped that the review will eventually result in the publication of a strategy regarding the management and use of Council's community assets, that it is essential that the assets contribute to the delivery plan and making sure that it produces real outcomes for residents.
- Review should take a strategic perspective, that it should consider local need and match it with what is available.
- Meeting was advised that the Council has responsibility for 3 community centres, Andover, St Lukes and Popham and Cummings.
- There are a further 48 community centres within Islington which are not directly managed by Council.
- Committee will receive a presentation on the 3 community centres at the October meeting explaining how it is staffed, the activities and how local people are used to service the delivery model.
- Meeting were invited to consider the scoping document and input welcomed.
- Councillor McHugh suggested the inclusion of an additional objective to address the community need and the wording states-To map the community centre offer in Islington, in particular forms of community provision, and to identify areas of need.
- As part of the review exercise, members will be offered visit to the community centres so as to understand how it is managed and operated.
- In addition, the committee will receive evidence community centres that are managed by voluntary organisation.
- A member requested that as part of the review consideration should be given to accessibility concerns especially with regards to youth provision and after school clubs within this community centres.
- In response the Executive member reminded that in light of the financial constraints, committee would need to be realistic as keeping all the community centres would be very challenging.

RESOLVED:

- That the Scrutiny Initiation Document is agreed subject to the inclusion of the additional objective.
- That Officers will provide a detailed presentation on Community Centres at the next meeting.

21

HOMELESSNESS PREVENTION AND ROUGH SLEEPING STRATEGY - UPDATE ON CONSULTATION AND NEXT STEPS (Item B2)

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Ian Swift, Director of Housing Needs and Strategy updated committee on Council's Homelessness Prevention and Rough Sleeping Strategy. The following points were noted-

- Meeting was advised that officers have undertaken formal consultation following Committee's consideration of the draft strategy at the last meeting.
- Officers have conducted engagement and consultation activities with partners, residents, colleagues and peers and online.
- Feedback received shows that more work is required on the strategy especially around young black people.
- After consideration by HMT, the final documents will be produced, moving through the governance process for final agreement by Executive by the end of 2024.
- In response to a question about S21 homelessness, the Director acknowledged that there has been an increase in circumstances causing homelessness yearly and Council has earmarked resources to assist and support people as the Council has a statutory duty of care. Meeting was reassured that steps are being undertaken to reduce the impact and the Service is in the process of redesigning the Service.
- On the quality of temporary accommodation for rough sleepers or emergency centres, meeting was reminded that in the last 4 years the Council has bought 500 properties with plans for another 200 in the next 2 years
- In response to a question, meeting was advised that Council ensures accommodation is of high quality standard, however in light of the Council's financial constraints some temporary accommodation have noticeably fallen short, however when brought to the attention of the Council, it is immediately addressed or residents are moved into other suitable accommodation. Members feedback to improve quality standard is welcomed.

RESOLVED:

That the report be noted

22

ISLINGTON CARE LEAVERS AND HOUSING PROTOCOL (Item B3)

Ian Swift, Director of Housing Needs and Strategy updated committee on Islington's Council's Care Leavers and Housing Protocol. The following points were noted

- Meeting was advised that report before committee is at the request of both the Chair of Children Services Committee and the former Vice Chair of the Committee, that the report is scheduled for consideration at the meeting of the Children's Scrutiny Committee before it is formally adopted. All stakeholders have been consulted in the development of the framework, noting that this is a partnership co-developed with Children Services.
- Meeting was reminded that Islington Council supports the principle that children looked after should be supported on their journey to independence. As part of the council's framework, the role of housing as part of the Corporate Parenting offer is now being improved through the attached Protocol.
- Meeting was advised that it is a radical framework, that some of the proposals have been adopted by central government.
- The Protocol has been produced jointly by Children's Services and Homes and Neighbourhoods to strengthen the partnership work between Homes and Neighbourhoods and Children's services and placing Looked After Child at the centre.
- Meeting was reminded that Islington Council is committed to its role as a corporate parent, including young people who have left its care upon reaching adulthood.
- Under homelessness legislation, young people who were formerly in care aged 18-20 are automatically in 'priority need'. This means that if they become homeless there is a duty to provide temporary and potentially permanent accommodation.

- As a corporate parent to all children in care and care leavers all parts of a local authority, including a housing authority, must have regard to the need, to act in the best interests, and promote the physical and mental health and well-being, of those children and young people, to encourage those children and young people to express their views, wishes and feelings, to take into account the views, wishes and feelings of those children and young people, to help those children and young people gain access to, and make the best use of, services provided by the local authority and its relevant partners. to promote high aspirations, and seek to secure the best outcomes, for those children and young people, for those children and young people to be safe, and for stability in their home lives, relationships and education or work, and. to prepare those children and young people for adulthood and independent living.
- Meeting was advised that by working together, housing authorities and children's services authorities can better ensure that as a corporate parent, the appropriate accommodation and support is available to care leavers.
- Meeting was advised that Islington Council rarely makes care leavers intentionally homeless, so the impact of the recommendations in this report would be minimal.
- In response to concerns that young people from outside of Islington may take advantage of a more lenient homelessness offer, meeting was advised of the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 which makes provisions for referrals to other local authorities where someone does not have a 'local connection' to the area they have presented as homeless to. A provision has always existed in homelessness legislation, but the 2017 Act made it possible to do this at an earlier stage. Therefore, even if care leavers from other areas do present themselves to Islington – they can be reconnected to the local authority they do have a connection to.
- Islington Council has adopted the principle that all care leavers are to be presumed as being in 'priority need' under homelessness legislation until the age of twenty-five.
- On the question of whether this offer could be extended beyond the age of 25, meeting was advised that although Council did extend the age from 16 to 25 years, this could be looked into later as there is a recognition that in light of the cost of living and numerous challenges people up to 30 years have difficulties.
- In response to a question, meeting was advised that although the Council have allocated places for care leavers over the next 3 years however needs may change.
- The Director advised that Committee will be receiving a protocol between Housing and Children's services especially for children living in temporary accommodation at the next meeting.
- Meeting was advised that besides the accommodation offer, employment has been offered to the care leavers within housing and training provided with the hope that they can get work within the Council.

Chair welcomed the protocol for care leavers thanking the officers for the work undertaken.

RESOLVED:

That the report be noted.

23

ROUGH SLEEPING DATA (Item B4)

Ian Swift, Director of Housing Needs and Strategy updated committee on Council's Rough Sleeping Data. The following points were noted:

- In Islington on the 1st of April to the 1st of July 2024 period Islington recorded ninety-four people sleeping rough, this is an increase of nineteen people from the previous quarter and fifty-four people higher than the same period last year in 2023.
- In Islington it is recorded that there are twenty people living on the streets, this is an increase of two people from the previous quarter and an increase of eight people sleeping on the streets for the same period in 2023.
- The number of people intermittently sleeping rough in Islington was identified as fifty-one people intermittently sleeping on the streets of Islington, this is an increase of three people from the previous quarter and an increase of twenty-five people for the same period in 2023.
- Therefore, in total in Islington during the April to June 2024 quarter, 162 people were identified as sleeping rough in Islington, this is an increase of nineteen from the previous quarter and an increase of eighty-five for the same period in 2023. A contributory factor in the increase in rough sleeping locally is a direct result of departures from Home Office accommodation, following settled status being granted. During April – June 2024, 18 NASS leavers were met rough sleeping in Islington, with some travelling to Islington/London from outside. Whilst the Council have been proactive in establishing an accommodation pathway for this cohort and providing 'in-reach' into Home Office hotels in borough, to support transition, the quick turnaround time of notice following status decision, coupled with the local housing allowance for under 35's, which make up the majority of this group, presents specific challenges.
- Due to the increasing number of people 'living on the streets', it is even more important that the new homeless prevention and rough sleeping strategy underpins a commitment for cross departmental working to ensure the needs of these people living on our streets are met holistically. This is not simply a housing issue and as such ASC, public health and mental health input are essential to meeting the needs of people experiencing multiple disadvantages, which is also in line with the Council's Fairer Together 2030 commitment and the council's CARE values.
- Islington will continue to seek funding opportunities and innovative ways of working through actively taking part in test and learn pilots and securing accommodation and support which are needs led. Islington has recently been successfully chosen to pilot two test and learn projects for personalised budgets and accommodate and reconnect with Centre for Homelessness Impact (CHI) to test these interventions impact on rough sleeping.
- As part of our commitment to put the resident at the centre of all that we do, we will ensure that we continue to listen to the voices of those with lived experience of homelessness through consultation and co-production. Arts International are currently supporting consultation of draft Homelessness Strategy.
- Eight councils in London recorded higher numbers of people sleeping rough compared to Islington.
- In response to a question on the count and the 18 new people found sleeping on Islington streets, Director advised that only 2 were identified as long time rough sleepers and were offered accommodation and support.
- The chair thanked the Director and his team for the enormous work carried to ensure that there is support for vulnerable people.

RESOLVED:

That the report be noted.

24

QUARTERLY REVIEW OF HOUSING PERFORMANCE (Q1 2024/2025) (Item B5)

Committee received the Quarter 1 Performance Report from the Corporate Director, Homes and Neighbourhood. The following points were highlighted

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- A noticeable high level of complaints has been recorded and work is underway to address this issue, an improvement plan is in place.
- Another area of concerns is with regards to lift maintenance, caused by challenges experienced by sub-contractors, however Council has employed a contractor to address this shortcomings, so members will observe a noticeable improvement to the safety checks in the next quarterly report.
- Council has agreed a Lift capital programme over the next 5 years which will result in the Council replacing old and obsolete lifts thereby reducing recurring breakdowns.
- In response to concerns that lift breakdowns are not solely caused by age of lift, but by residents, Director advised that this information is not available but would ensure this data is analysed and provided at future meeting.
- Director assured that the new lifts being installed will come with sensor technology which will inform the team if parts need replacement or possible breakdowns thereby increasing their performances.
- The Corporate Director agreed that details about the lift programme will be brought to future meetings.
- In terms of repairs, it was noted that Council uses a mixture of sub-contractors and in house staff and in some specialist activities such as plant maintenance this will be outsourced due to insurance requirements.
- On the issue of complaints and if it included leaseholders, Director advised that although not included in the report however data is captured and will be available in the next quarterly report. He also informed meeting of plans to launch a leaseholder forum, and that presently leaseholders do attend the Resident Improvement meetings.
- In response to a question of whether there was enough capacity to manage the increasing workload especially with the need to restore ex RTB properties recent the Director advised that capacity has been increased especially with in house staff.
- Members were reminded that over the last few years, there has been an increase in demand for repairs, not unique to Islington Council, that this requires a balancing act as resources are being diverted away from the Council's capital programmes .

RESOLVED:

That the report be noted.

25 WORK PROGRAMME 2024/25 (Item B6)

Chair reminded members to take up the invitation of a scrutiny visit to community centres when facilitated by officers

A request for an update on Council's changes to communal heating hours to be included on the committee work plan was noted.

Councillor enquired if committee could be provided an update on Wellington Mews

RESOLVED:

That the work plan be noted

An officer update on communal heating hours

Also officer update about Wellington Mews.

The meeting ended at 9.00 pm

CHAIR